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Island to Keep Statistical Designation

By Phillip Lutz

Long Island members of Congress and the federal Office of Management and Budget have reached an agreement under which the Island will retain its designation as a distinct statistical unit.

Under the agreement, reached late last month, the budget office would release data and statistics for Nassau and Suffolk counties separately, rather than as part of a larger statistical unit. The two counties would also be named in the title of a 23-county grouping called the New York-Northern New Jersey-Nassau/Suffolk Metropolitan Statistical Area. And federal agencies would be instructed to consider Nassau and Suffolk separately when deciding what programs to finance.

In agreeing to these moves, the budget office effectively reversed decisions it had announced in early June, when the agency said that Nassau and Suffolk would be downgraded to a division of the metro area, a decision that could have affected the counties' ability to win federal grants, compare the Island with other populous regions and attract new business.

The deal was reached after a period of intense lobbying by Long Island's congressional delegation, who, along with local officials, had raised an outcry after the initial decision. Responding to the outcry, the budget office agreed in late June to reopen the period of public comment until Sept. 30.

"We fought this fight and won," said Representative Steve Israel, Democrat of Huntington. "We have preserved our cultural identity, all our funding, and our data-gathering abilities exclusively for Nassau and Suffolk."

Lee E. Koppelman, the executive director of the Long Island Regional Planning Board, said that the agreement answered his basic concerns, that "our statistics not be subordinated within the larger New York metropolitan area" and that "Long Island not be shortchanged in terms of eligibility for various federal programs."

Mr. Israel said he had a "handshake agreement" with the budget office, which still must formally announce the deal. Phillip Lutz

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